



A journal for restless minds

IN HIS PRESENCE

Trembling at the thought

CATHOLIC TRADITION

Knowing what is required

FINDING THE WAY HOME

*Like *deja-vu*, all over again*

WHAT'S IN YOUR MIND?

Can you hear me now?

DEACON'S DINER

Food for a restless mind

Colloquī is a Deacon's Corner weekly journal. Its mission and purpose: to encourage serious discussion, to promote reasoned debate, and to provide serious content for those who hope to find their own pathway to God.

Each week Colloquī will contain articles on theology, philosophy, faith, religion, Catholicism, and much more.

Be forewarned! Articles may and often will contain fuel for controversy, but always with the express intent to seek the Truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help us God.

In His Presence

Trembling at the thought

As a young Catholic growing up in the fifties and sixties I can recall—with a longing in my soul—the reverence and the awe I felt when in His Presence. It was a sacred time and you knew it; you were on holy ground and you felt it; you were in His house and you trembled at the very thought of it.

The church was old but full of marvelous statues and images, beautifully stained glass windows and ornate light fixtures suspended from high above, and the large wooden altar painted white, with its spires and spindles reaching toward heaven tipped with gold. The altar railing stood low, guarding the sanctuary, in silent testimony to the sacred presence residing beyond its gates.

God was there and so we prayed and worshipped and adored. We knelt in humble supplication when we received our Lord upon the tongue. There was no

question what and who we received: it was the body and blood of our Lord, so sacred and holy that only the priest could hold or touch his preciousness.

From the moment you entered the church you knew you were in God's house—and of whom you were in the presence—God. You dressed as if you were in the presence of someone very important—because you were. You left the world behind when you walked through the doors. You behaved as if you were in the presence of a King—because you were.



Many say, "*Those days are gone*" and I must agree, with deep regret, for we have lost our sense of the sacred, the mystery and the majesty of God. We receive our Lord now, not with reverence and awe due our Lord, but like a handout. Too many no longer believe we are receiving the body and blood of Jesus Christ; it is merely a piece of bread and ordinary wine—symbols. They are mistaken.

I miss the sacred and the holy. I miss the trembling before the majesty of God.

Catholic Tradition

Knowing what is demanded

One distinct advantage to living a long life—beyond the mere satisfaction of outlasting more than a few unpleasant acquaintances and perhaps an enemy or two—is in having had the opportunity to dine upon a larger slice of the historical pie. Far better it is to dine on knowledge obtained through lived experience than from second-rate peddlers pushing third-hand watered-down politically-correct left-overs to the naïve, comatose, or intransigently dumb-founded.

Catholicism is an ancient faith, the *only* faith founded directly by Jesus Christ; all other 'Christian' faiths are recent (no older than 500 years) heretical knock-offs absent the authenticity and authority of the Catholic Church which Christ instituted. This is neither my opinion nor is it based on direct personal knowledge—I'm old but not *that* old—but the product of two millennia of irrefutable scholarship and a matter of empirical historical record.

Through apostolic succession, the magisterium (bishops) of the Catholic Church affirm that the doctrines of the Church are authoritative: taught by Christ to his apostles and subsequently told to "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."¹ Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit the Church is protected from doctrinal

error. Thus to deny one or more doctrines is to deny what Christ taught us.

Saint Thomas Aquinas defined heresy as "a species of infidelity in men who, having professed the faith of Christ, corrupt its dogmas." Heresy is both the non-orthodox belief itself, and the act of holding to that belief.



The Catholic Church makes several distinctions as to the seriousness of an individual heterodoxy and its closeness to true heresy. Only a belief that directly contravenes an Article of Faith, or that has been explicitly rejected by the Church, is labelled as actual "heresy."

The Code of Canon Law defines what Catholics must believe and what constitutes heresy:

Canon 750 §1. *A person must believe with divine and Catholic faith all those things contained in the word of God, written or handed on, that is, in the one deposit of faith entrusted to the Church, and at the same time proposed as divinely revealed either by the solemn magisterium of the Church or by its ordinary and universal magisterium which is manifested by the common adherence of the Christian faithful under the leadership of the sacred magisterium; therefore all are bound to*

avoid any doctrines whatsoever contrary to them.

§2. *Each and every thing which is proposed definitively by the magisterium of the Church concerning the doctrine of faith and morals, that is, each and every thing which is required to safeguard reverently and to expound faithfully the same deposit of faith, is also to be firmly embraced and retained; therefore, one who rejects those propositions which are to be held definitively is opposed to the doctrine of the Catholic Church.*

Canon 751 *Heresy is the obstinate denial or obstinate doubt after the reception of baptism of some truth which is to be believed by divine and Catholic faith; apostasy is the total repudiation of the Christian faith; schism is the refusal of submission to the Supreme Pontiff or of communion with the members of the Church subject to him.*

The essential elements of heresy are therefore, 1) obstinacy, or continued denial; 2) denial (a proposition contrary or contradictory in formal logic to a dogma) or doubt (a posited opinion, not being a firm denial, of the contrary or contradictory proposition to a dogma); 3) after reception of valid baptism; 4) of a truth categorized as being of "Divine and Catholic Faith," that is truth declared within either Sacred Scripture or Sacred Tradition.

What is of utmost is that pesky verb *must* which offers absolutely no wiggle room for any Catholic. A Catholic *must* believe all those things contained in Sacred Scripture (written) or

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

Sacred Tradition—the Deposit of Faith as proposed to be divinely revealed either by the solemn magisterium of the Church or by its ordinary and universal magisterium—(handed on.)

To be perfectly clear: Catholics *must* obey and believe all doctrine and dogma as proposed definitively by the magisterium of the Catholic Church. To obstinately deny or obstinately doubt any doctrine or dogma is heresy; there simply is no other word for it although since the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, there has arisen a new vocabulary which sadly and frustratingly too often mirrors the broader secular vocabulary in its ambiguity and imprecision.

The Church, since the Council, has produced a bewildering collection of neologisms² lacking any of the classical precision of Catholic doctrine: “collegiality,” “dialogue,” “dialogue with the world,” “interreligious dialogue,” “ecumenism,” “ecumenical venture,” “ecumenical dialogue,” “partial communion,” “imperfect communion,” “reconciled diversity,” “the Church of the new Advent,” “the new springtime of Vatican II,” “the new Pentecost,” “the new Evangelization,” “the civilization of love,” “the purification of memory,” “responsible parenthood,” “solidarity,” “the globalization of solidarity,” “the Spirit of Assisi,” “what unites us is greater than what divides us,” and so on. Although these words and phrases evade any precise definition, they have become the watchwords of post-conciliar thinking.

“Never before in Church history has the activity of the Church come to be gov-

erned by slogans and buzzwords that appear nowhere in the perennial Magisterium. In consequence, never has the Church’s message been so uncertain.”³

As a result of this new vocabulary, Catholics—especially those born post-council—are largely incapable of discerning precisely what it means to be Catholic and what Catholics *must* believe.

Why should this be so? Simply put, it has become increasingly difficult to ‘know the truth’ because truth has become *relative*, history has been radically and frequently *adjusted* to erase or alter whatever might be considered *objectionable*, and rational thought has been highly discouraged.

To be preconciliar Catholic meant no ambiguity in what was demanded by Sacred Tradition. Postconciliar Catholics were left confused by the lack of clarity in what was required of them.

One example should suffice to illustrate the radical nature of the Second Vatican Council which although it did not repudiate any article of divine and Catholic faith often materially opposed Catholic tradition.

“The preconciliar Popes uniformly condemned the contention that the received and approved rite of Mass had fallen into obscurity and ought to be ‘simplified,’ but Paul VI approved an entirely new and simplified rite which Cardinals Bacci and Ottaviani were constrained to protest as ‘a striking departure from the Catholic theology of the Mass as it was formulated in Session XXII of the Council of Trent.’

The preconciliar Popes taught that the Latin liturgy must be preserved as a barrier against heresy and a bond of unity in the Church, but Paul VI taught that it must be abandoned because ‘understanding of prayer is more important than the silken garments in which it is royally dressed’— thus contradicting even the teaching of his own immediate predecessor, Pope John XXIII.”

The imposition of the new rite of Mass had an immediate impact: drastic declines in Mass attendance, emptying of seminaries, and drastic declines in protestant conversions.

As a Catholic who grew up in the preconciliar Church I was taught and thus knew what every Catholic was required to believe as matters of faith. Doctrine and dogma were understood and well-attended because we knew what was at stake: the sanctity and salvation of our immortal soul.

As I have written elsewhere⁴ Catholics today often hold no concern for what is at stake should they ignore or deny Church teaching. This *a la carte* attitude is the direct result of the confusing and ambiguous output promulgated by the Council and the near total absence of clear, precise, unambiguous teaching provided by the leadership of the Church since. Let us pray for clarity and for the Catholic Church.

1. Mt 28:19-20.

2. Neologism: a relatively new or isolated term, word, or phrase.

3. Ferrara, Christopher; Woods Jr., Thomas. *The Great Facade: The Regime of Novelty in the Catholic Church from Vatican II to the Francis Revolution* (Second Edition), Angelico Press.

4. Deacon’s Corner Commentaries: *Catholicism A La Carte: choosing what to believe*, April 12, 2016, <http://deacons-corner.org/catholicism-a-la-carte>.

Finding The Way Home

Like deja-vu, all over again

The great baseball hall-of-fame catcher and manager Yogi Berra was well-known as a master of malapropisms. One of my favorites has always been *"It's like deja-vu, all over again,"* for despite its obvious tautological phrasing, in a very real sense it evokes a light-hearted metaphor for our tendency to make mistakes, too often the same ones over and over again. It would appear that we seldom learn from our mistakes, no matter how often we make them; it is indeed *"like deja-vu, all over again."*

Anyone who has ever engaged in a game of *"Why?"* with a precocious three-year old will readily understand how challenging it can be—after a seemingly endless string of *whys*—to end the game on a positive note. Let's face it, we either give in or give up, generally frustrated and angry with our child and with ourselves.

Is it any wonder God displayed such frustration and anger at his chosen people, Israel? They were finally free from bondage, escaping slavery with God's divine assistance, and almost immediately they turn to a false god, making for themselves a molten calf, worshipping it, and giving it undeserved credit for their freedom. Do you blame God for saying, *"I see how stiff-necked this people is, let me alone then, that my wrath may blaze up against them to consume them?"* Enough is enough! Why not consume those ungrateful miscreants and begin anew?

Yet God is a merciful and forgiving parent, infinitely patient, always willing to give his wayward and petulant children endless opportunities to turn back to him. God relented in his threat to destroy the people of Israel; he gave them another chance. But, just how well did that turn out? How faithful have the people of God—all of humanity throughout the ages—kept faith with him, obedient to his commandments and his Word?



The Israelites turned away from God to worship an image made of gold, a man-made object which while pleasing to the eye was nothing more than a lump of molten metal. And yet, so enamored were they by all that empty glitter, they dismissed without thought the one true God, the one who had brought them out of Egypt and slavery into freedom and the promised land.

Has humanity, God's creation, changed at all since then? Yes, although most certainly for the worse; in many ways, much worse. Instead of a

golden calf we now worship a plethora of man-made gods, gods which entice us, lure us away, and keep us from acknowledging and worshipping the one true God.

Saint Paul gratefully acknowledged God's patience and mercy, admitting how he had once been a blasphemer and a persecutor of the followers of *'the way'*—the disciples of our Lord, Jesus Christ. He believed at the time that he was doing what was right; out of ignorance he sought, captured, and persecuted those whom he believed were heretics and apostates to the Jewish faith.

What is most clear is how great was Saint Paul's radical change of heart: from arrogance and selfishness to humility and selflessness. Through Jesus Christ, he was made aware of the evil that he was doing and the evil that was in the world. He came to believe that through the grace of God, Jesus Christ, his only Son, was sent into the world to save sinners—that is, all of us—

but only if we set aside all our worldly gods for God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Seldom do we admit to worshipping false gods yet what must it be other than idolatry when we can find little or no time for God but all the time for worldly things?

How many of us seek to acquire more than we need, all that we desire? More money, bigger houses, fancy cars, more, more, more, always more and better stuff.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 5

Aren't we just as guilty when we place ourselves and our possessions before God? How often do we excuse ourselves from prayer or worship to attend secular activities and events?

Unless we are willing and able to see the evil that surrounds us, we can never be agents of God's mercy and forgiveness. We are but moral idiots when we are willing to make excuses or refuse to see evil for what it is, to see the worship of false gods as not so bad or somehow acceptable or excusable.

Saint Paul admits to the evil that he once did. He neither glosses over it nor does he make himself a moral idiot. He obtained God's mercy because God could see the man he could become.

And we are called to do likewise. When you see others—be it a parent, friend, co-worker, or stranger—in sinful conduct, you must see it clearly for what it is, evil. Yet you must not see the sin as the sum and substance of the sinner for assuredly that person now is not the same as in the past nor what may be in the future.

When you look into the eyes of a sinner, you can only see a glimmer of whom or what a person is, a momentary snapshot of now. You cannot see what has come before nor can you know what is yet to be. You cannot know what lies within, only what is visible on the outside.

The worship of false gods takes many forms. The prodigal son desired his freedom and his inheritance, far

more than he deserved, certainly more than he had earned. He declared his father dead and worshipped on the altar of idolatry by his life of dissipation.

And when he came to his senses and went crawling back to his father, he fully expected—rightfully so—to be treated as the dissolute reprobate that he had become, to get what he deserved. But what he got from his father was completely undeserved. Instead of disdain and rejection, he received forgiveness, mercy and unconditional love.

God does not wish to deny us from having those things that bring us enjoyment and pleasure. All He asks is that we love Him above all things and before all else.

St. Augustine, in his *Confessions* described how the desire to possess things kept him from God.

*Late have I loved you,
O Beauty ever ancient, ever new,
late have I loved you!
You were within me,
but I was outside,
and it was there
that I searched for you.
In my unloveliness
I plunged into the lovely things
which you created.
You were with me,
but I was not with you.
Created things kept me from you;
yet if they had not been in you
they would have not been at all.*

We are all sinners for we are human, burdened with concupiscence, the inclination to sin. Even the saints, those holy people of God, were sinners, some guilty of grave and deadly

sin. Saint Paul admitted to being a blasphemer and a persecutor of God's people. Saint Augustine, a venerated Doctor of the Church, lived a hedonistic lifestyle, had a lover until his conversion, and fathered a son out of wedlock.

Saint Monica raised her son Augustine to be a Christian. But like the prodigal son, Augustine chose to reject God and live a life of dissipation for over twenty years. Neither his mother nor God ever gave up on him; his mother prayed every day for his redemption, while God knew what he was destined to become.

From a very personal point of view I must confess that I have been the beneficiary of God's mercy, forgiveness, and love. Like Augustine, for over thirty years I plunged into the lovely things which God created. God was with me but I was seldom with God. For many years I lacked the courage to return to Him, to admit my mistakes and sins, and to ask Him for forgiveness.

But God is infinitely patient and will wait for as long as it takes for you to come to your senses, to quit being moral idiots. May God, our heavenly Father, and his only Son, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit have mercy on we sinners, one and all. Amen.



Homily for
24th Sunday in Ordinary Time — Cycle C
Exodus 32:7-11,13-14
1 Timothy 1:12-17
Luke 15:1-32

What's In Your Mind?

Can you hear me now?

The precipitous descent of the Catholic mind into the abyss of blithe obliviousness and bland indifference ought to be of great concern yet by any and all indications it barely produces a yawn from Church leadership and Catholic public figures.

As noted in the October edition of *First Things* (R. R. Reno, *While We're At It*, p. 67) this past July, Archbishop Charles Chaput of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia issued a set of guidelines for implementing Pope Francis's apostolic exhortation on marriage and family, *Amoris Laetitia*. Reno writes of the guidelines:

"The document urges the Church's pastors to recognize that Catholics today are often profoundly misled by the prevailing culture, making it very difficult for them to accept the truth of the Church's teaching on the permanence of marriage and the moral meaning of sexual acts. ... It's not uncommon for Catholics to think divorce and remarriage are fine, and that gay unions should be blessed."

Both the Archbishop and Reno are correct in their recognition of the alarming trend toward vacuity of the Catholic mind yet their recommended correctives fall vapidly short of useful. For instance, the guidelines suggest:

"These people should not be pushed away, but instead drawn into a close engagement with the Church's teaching and communal life. This means pastors must be willing to be present to them to explain what the Church actually teaches. The greatest work of mercy, therefore, isn't to bend rules. It is to form consciences according to the truth."



One might reasonably ask what is meant precisely by the statement: "These people should be ... drawn into a closer engagement with the Church's teaching and communal life?" Small wonder our minds are turning to mush.

As for pastors explaining what the Church actually teaches, good luck with that. This presupposes that every pastor is well-versed and in complete agreement with Church teaching—at best questionable in either regard—and assumes those in "irregular situations" are willing to listen and accept what the Church teaches and are prepared to "go and sin no more."

Honest, straightforward conversation is essential, of course, but seldom of any permanent or serious consequence. Just as the question "Can you hear me now?" presupposes someone listening, the guidelines assume the same. But how often will that be the case? I wonder.

Reno continues:

"Which, as the guidelines state with exemplary clarity, is why it's not merciful to tell a divorced and remarried couple who live as husband and wife that it's fine for them to receive Communion. Nor is it merciful for a pastor preparing a couple for marriage to act as if their cohabitation presents no serious impediment. And it's certainly not merciful to pretend that same-sex couple who insist on public affirmation of their sexual union can simply become normal members of a parish community."

From personal experience in preparing couples for marriage, nine out of ten couples are in a cohabitating relationship. No matter how well-informed they may become after I have explained clearly and precisely what the Church teaches and why cohabitation is sinful and immoral, and as firmly as they assent to cease cohabitating, I harbor no illusions as to how many actually follow through with their promise. The divine truth of the Church's teaching—of Christ's teaching—is lost, beyond their ability to comprehend anymore than a three-year old is capable of comprehending nuclear physics.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

What is needed is clear, unambiguous speech—something seldom heard these days—reminiscent of the old adage: “*Say what you mean, mean what you say, and do what you say you’ll do.*” Instead, what we hear is most often what someone thinks we want or expect to hear rather than the unvarnished truth. Or...we hear spin, speech couched in ‘politically correct’ terminology with the explicit intent to obfuscate and misdirect. Or...we are bombarded with neologisms—slogans and buzzwords—that are so imprecise and ambiguous as to convey nothing of any import.

As workplace consultant Tom Dennis writes, “*Isn’t it better to hear what was meant rather than what the speaker thinks you want to hear? How can people expect to make informed decisions if the person speaking to them isn’t saying what he/she means? By really saying what you mean, you cut through the clutter and present the facts or your direct opinion so that things can be discussed meaningfully without going through a kabuki dance. While this direct approach of saying what you mean may startle, surprise, or discomfort others, you’re really better off knowing directly what was meant rather than having to interpret, often incorrectly. This doesn’t mean you should be insulting, just direct.*”¹

Of course, speaking clearly and saying what you mean carries with it the risk of condemnation for being so forthright and honest. It also requires certain knowledge of the facts upon which you speak so as to insure that you are free from the dreaded ‘foot in

mouth’ disease, of which politicians are frequently infected but blissfully ignorant of such infection.

A few days after Archbishop Chaput issued his guidelines, the mayor of Philadelphia, Jim Kenney, a professed Catholic and liberal Democrat publicly offered this commentary on Twitter: “*Jesus gave us the gift of Holy Communion because he so loved us. All of us. Chaput’s actions are not Christian.*”

As Reno makes clear:

“*The mayor demonstrates theological illiteracy. His logic leads to the conclusion that the unbaptized should receive Communion. To deny it to them would be unchristian. But let’s leave that aside. More striking is the abuse of public office. It’s chilling to see a person exercising secular authority pronounce on the theological legitimacy of an archbishop’s statements and policies. It appears that liberals insist on the separation of Church and state—except when they don’t.*

The pattern is common. Liberals insist on tolerance—except when political correctness dictates otherwise. They champion inclusion—except when they ruthlessly exclude any one who dissents from their ‘inclusive’ views. They chastise those who are judgmental, a self-contradiction that would be amusing were it not so punitive. Thus Kenney: Jesus loves all of us—except for Archbishop of Philadelphia Charles Chaput, who holds supposedly unchristian views.”²

Archbishop Charles Chaput is, in this Catholic’s mind, a breath of fresh air in a room filled with stale smoke. I can only hope it is contagious.

1. Tom Dennis, *Workplace Insanity*, September 29, 2010.

2. R. R. Reno, *While We’re At It*, First Things, October 2016, pg. 67.

Deacon’s Diner

Food for a restless mind

For those restless minds that hunger and thirst for more. Each week this space will offer a menu of interesting and provocative titles, written by Catholic authors, in addition to those referenced in the articles, for you to feed your restless mind.

BOOKS

Subtracting Christianity

Joseph Sobran

FGF Books

June 20, 2016, 428 pages.

Practical Theology

Peter Kreeft

Ignatius Press

November 28, 2014, 400 pages.

Disorientation: How to Go to College Without Losing Your Mind

Edited by John Zmirak

Ascension Press

December 21, 2010, 188 pages.

PERIODICALS

First Things

Institute on Religion and Public Life

Editor: R. R. Reno

Ten Issues per year.

www.firstthings.com

Touchstone

A Journal of Mere Christianity

Editor: James M. Kushiner

Bi-Monthly.

www.touchstonemag.com

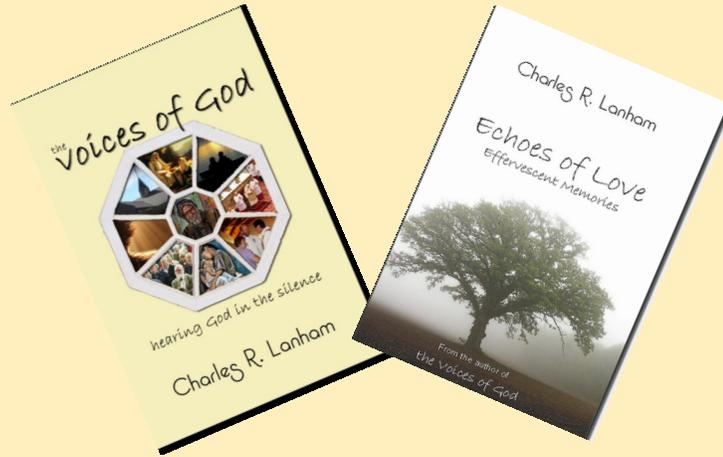
Catholic Answers Magazine

Share the Faith, Defend the Faith

Editor: Tim Ryland

Bi-Monthly.

www.catholic.com



Books are available on **Amazon.com** or from the author's web site at:

deaconscorner.org

Deacon Chuck Lanham is an author, columnist, speaker, and a servant of God.

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Each issue of **Colloquī** can be viewed or downloaded from

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